

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF HOUSING SCRUTINY STANDING PANEL
HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 7 DECEMBER 2005
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2, CIVIC OFFICES, EPPING
AT 5.00 - 6.25 PM**

Members Present:	S Murray (Chairman), Mrs R Gadsby (Vice-Chairman), K Angold-Stephens, Mrs A Grigg, Mrs J Lea, L Martin and T Richardson
Other members present:	(none)
Apologies for Absence:	Mrs S Perry, Mrs J H Whitehouse and Mrs M Carter (Epping Forest Tenants and Leasholders Federation)
Officers Present	A Hall (Head of Housing Services) and Z Folley (Democratic Services Assistant)
Also in attendance:	(none)

24. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

The Panel noted that there were no substitute members appointed for the meeting.

25. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest made pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct.

26. NOTES OF THE LAST MEETING - 15 SEPTEMBER 2005

Noted

A Hall referred to matters considered by the last meeting. He advised that the Cabinet had endorsed the proposed changes to the Housing Allocation Scheme and the Panels recommendations on the Introductory Tenants Scheme. The Portfolio Holder had supported the bid to the ODPM for the Choice Based letting Scheme.

27. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME

Noted.

Noted that a report on changes to the Terms/of Reference was the subject of the next agenda item.

The Private Sector Housing Condition Survey had been completed. Environmental Services had received the survey. It was hoped that they would be submitting a report on the findings to the Panel meeting in March 2006. The Head of Environmental Services had reported that the draft Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy would not be completed until September 2006 as it was awaiting the outcome of the finding of the Private Sector Condition Survey and the government consultation exercise on the Disabled Facilities Grant.

28. REFFERALS FROM THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Noted that the OSC had resolved that the item on Housing Related Fees and Charges be deleted from the Terms of reference. This was to ensure that the Panel did not overlap the work of the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel which was also due to consider the issue.

The OSC agreed that of the two Panels it was more appropriate for the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel to consider the issue as part of its wider scrutiny of all fees and charges proposals.

The Head of Housing Services reported that concern had been expressed at the level of affordable housing being facilitated by the Council compared to the increasing need. Noted that having considered this information, the OSC had agreed that the Panel be asked to consider ways in which the amount of affordable Housing in the District could be increased.

Noted the constraints on the Council's ability to provide affordable housing and recommendations of the Head of Housing Services and the Management Board.

Noted that the Head of Housing Services would be producing a report on the review for March 2006. The Panel considered the scope of the report.

Noted the work that the Council was undertaking with the Housing Authority in order to develop small Council owned sites. Agreed that the report should explore the merits of developing affordable housing on these sites and work up some schemes.

Noted that some London Authorities were looking to support housing schemes outside the London area. Noted that the RSL had proposed that some of this expenditure be sought to support developments in this District. The Panel supported the idea and agreed that the report work up this suggestion and the issue of nomination rights for the initiative.

Noted that the report could explore the site at Trinity Church, Loughton, a site at Pylres Lane, Loughton and the playing fields at Epping Forest College to ascertain whether they could provide land for additional affordable housing.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the deletion by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of Term (3)(v) (relating to the consideration of the Annual Review of Housing-Related Fees and Charges prior to consideration by the Cabinet) from the Panel's Terms of Reference be noted;
- 2) That the request of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the Housing Scrutiny Panel to consider ways of increasing the amount of affordable housing within the District, as an addition to its Work Programme 2005/6 be noted;
- 3) That the scope of the future report to be produced by the Head of Housing Services by March 2006 on ways to increase affordable housing in the District be as set out in Paragraph 8 of the report together with the options identified at the meeting.

29. EMPTY PROPERTIES IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR - CURRENT POSITION ON DEVELOPMENT OF STRATEGY

Noted that a further paper on the development of a strategy for Empty Properties in the Private Sector was due to be submitted to the next meeting of the Panel in January 2006. Noted that at this time Environmental Services would hope to be in a position to feed back on the partnership bid made to the Regional Housing Pot and the findings of the House Condition Survey.

Agreed that the Empty Homes Agency be invited to attend the next meeting to discuss strategies in place elsewhere.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the current position on the development of a strategy for Empty Properties in the Private Sector be noted; and
- 2) That the Empty Homes Agency be invited to attend the next meeting.

30. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS PLAN 2005 (KEY ACTION PLAN) - SIX-MONTH PROGRESS REPORT

The Panel considered the latest progress report (as at 20 September 2005) for the Key Action Plan contained within the HRA Business Plan 2005. This set out the proposed action that the Council would take over the following 1-3 years in relation to the management and maintenance of its own housing stock.

In relation to the action to submit at least one tender for the monitoring of alarm systems, noted that no invitations had arisen in locations where officers thought would be appropriate for the Council to submit a tender. Should a tender be received from a suitable location, it was likely that an offer could be made.

RESOLVED:

That the latest Six-month Progress Report for the Key Action Plan contained within the HRA Business Plan 2005 be noted.

31. WITNESS PROTECTION MOBILITY SCHEME

The Head of Housing Services presented the report.

The Panel considered the relevant issues and decided to support the scheme.

The Panel further agreed that no more than one property should be offered to applicants on the Witness Protection Mobility Scheme applicants within any 24 month period.

Noted that the report would be converted into a Portfolio Holder decision for consideration by the Portfolio Holder.

RESOLVED:

That the report with the proposal that recommendation 2 a) be pursued be supported and submitted to the Portfolio Holder for consideration.

32. JOINT CHOICE BASED LETTINGS SCHEME - ORAL UPDATE

The Head of Housing Services reminded the Panel that the Council had joined with five neighbouring Authorities to form the Herts and Essex Housing Options Consortium. The Group had submitted a bid for £96,000 to the ODPM's Regional Fund to assist with the implementation of a Joint Scheme. A copy of the final version of the request was before the Panel for information.

The Head of Housing Services stated that the ODPM had recently reported that the bid had been successful. Nationally 28 bids had been submitted. Of these 15 had attracted funding.

A copy of the letter from the ODPM confirming the success of the bid was circulated for information.

RESOLVED:

1) That the oral report from The Head of Housing Services and the circulated papers on the outcome of the bid to the ODPM for funding to implement a Joint Choice Based Lettings Scheme by the Herts and Essex Housing Consortium be noted;

2) That the Assistant Head of Housing Services (Operations) be thanked for all his hard work in connection with the scheme.

33. EPPING FOREST LOCAL SUPPORTING PEOPLE STRATEGY 2005 - 6 MONTH PROGRESS REPORT

The Panel considered the latest progress report for the Epping Forest Local Supporting People Strategy.

In respect of Jessopp Court, the step down from hospital discharge scheme, noted that the 'step-down' flat had received very little use by the PCT and Essex Social Care. As a result the scheme had been discontinued by these services. The flat had been passed back to the Council. The Panel considered the nomination rights for Cunningham House.

RESOLVED:

That the Six-month Progress Report for the Epping Forest Local Supporting People Strategy 2005-2009 be noted.

34. REPORTS TO BE MADE TO THE NEXT MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There were no reports to be made.

35. FUTURE MEETINGS

30 January 2006 at 5.00 p.m

Z Folley to book room and put item in Members Bulletin.